16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

CHAPTER XVIII

MANNERS

'Not where others fail, or do, or leave undone—the wise should notice what himself has done, or left undone.'—*Dammapada.*

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A REMARKABLE trait of the Burmese character is their unwillingness to interfere in other people's affairs. Whether it arises from their religion of self-culture or no, I cannot say, but it is in full keeping with it. Every man's acts and thoughts are his own affair, think the Burmans; each man is free to go his own way, to think his own thoughts, to act his own acts, as long as he does not too much annoy his neighbours. Each man is responsible for himself and for himself alone, and there is no need for him to try and be guardian also to his fellows. And so the Burman likes to go his own way, to be a free man within certain limits; and the freedom that he demands for himself, he will extend also to his neighbours. He has a very great and wide tolerance towards all his neighbours, not thinking it necessary to disapprove of his neighbours' acts because they may not be the same as his own, never thinking it necessary to interfere with his

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

neighbours as long as the laws are not broken. Our ideas that what habits are different to our habits must be wrong, and being wrong, require correction at our hands, is very far from his thoughts. He never desires to interfere with anyone. Certain as he is that his own ideas are best, he is contented with that knowledge, and is not ceaselessly desirous of proving it upon other people. And so a foreigner may go and live in a Burman village, may settle down there and live his own life and follow his own customs in perfect freedom, may dress and eat and drink and pray and die as he likes. No one will interfere. No one will try and correct him; no one will be for ever insisting to him that he is an outcast, either from civilization or from religion. The people will accept him for what he is, and leave the matter there. If he likes to change his ways and conform to Burmese habits and Buddhist forms, so much the better; but if not, never mind.

It is, I think, a great deal owing to this habit of mind that the manners of the Burmese are usually so good, children in civilization as they are. There is amongst them no rude inquisitiveness and no desire to in any way circumscribe your freedom, by either remark or act. Surely of all things that cause trouble, nothing is so common amongst us as the interference with each other's ways, as the needless giving of advice. It seems to each of us that we are responsible, not only for ourselves, but also for everyone else near us; and so if we disapprove of any act, we are always in a hurry to express our disapproval and to try and persuade the actor to our way of thinking. We are for ever thinking of others

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

571 and trying to improve them; as a nation we try to coerce weaker nations and to convert stronger ones, and as individuals we do the same. We are sure that other people cannot but be better and happier for being brought into our ways of thinking, by force even, if necessary. We call it philanthropy.

571 609 [779] But the Buddhist does not believe this at all. Each man, each nation has, he thinks, enough to do managing his or its own affairs. Interference, any sort of interference, he is sure can do nothing but harm. *You* cannot save a man. He can save himself; you can do nothing for him. You may force or persuade him into an outer agreement with you, but what is the value of that? All dispositions that are good, that are of any value at all, must come spontaneously from the heart of man. First, he must desire them, and then struggle to obtain them; by this means alone can any virtue be reached. This, which is the key of his religion, is the key also of his private life. Each man is a free man to do what he likes, in a way that we have never understood.

Even under the rule of the Burmese kings there was the very widest tolerance. You never heard of a foreigner being molested in any way, being forbidden to live as he liked, being forbidden to erect his own places of worship. He had the widest freedom, as long as he infringed no law. The Burmese rule may not have been a good one in many ways, but it was never guilty of persecution, of any attempt at forcible conversion, of any desire to make such an attempt.

This tolerance, this inclination to let each man

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

This tolerance, this inclination to let each man go his own way, is conspicuous even down to the little events of life. It is very marked, even in conversation, how little criticism is indulged in towards each other, how there is an absolute absence of desire to proselytize each other in any way. 'It is his way,' they will say, with a laugh, of any peculiar act of any person; 'it is his way. What does it matter to us?' Of all the lovable qualities of the Burmese, and they are many, there are none greater than these—their light-heartedness and their tolerance.

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A Burman will always assume that you know your own business, and will leave you alone to do it. How great a boon this is I think we hardly can understand, for we have none of it. And he carries it to an extent that sometimes surprises us.

Suppose you are walking along a road and there is a broken bridge on the way, a bridge that you might fall through. No one will try and prevent you going. Any Burman who saw you go will, if he think at all about it, give you the credit for knowing what you are about. It will not enter into his head to go out of his way to give you advice about that bridge. If you ask him he will help you all he can, but he will not volunteer; and so if you depend on volunteered advice, you may fall through the bridge and break your neck, perhaps.

At first this sort of thing seems to us to spring from laziness or from discourtesy. It is just the reverse of this latter; it is excess of courtesy that assumes you to be aware of what you are about, and capable of judging properly.

You may get yourself into all sorts of trouble,

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

571 and unless you call out no one will assist you. They will suppose that if you require help you will soon ask for it. You could drift all the way from Bhamo to Rangoon on a log, and I am sure no one would try to pick you up unless you shouted for help. Let anyone try to drift down from Oxford to Richmond, and he will be forcibly saved every mile of his journey, I am sure. The Burman boatmen you passed would only laugh and ask how you were getting on. The English boatman would have you out of that in a jiffy, saving you despite yourself. You might commit suicide in Burma, and no one would stop you. 'It is your own look-out,' they would say; 'if you want to die why should we prevent you? What business is it of ours?'

Never believe for a moment that this is cold-heartedness. Nowhere is there any man so kind-hearted as a Burman, so ready to help you, so hospitable, so charitable both in act and thought.

It is only that he has another way of seeing these things to what we have. He would resent as the worst discourtesy that which we call having a friendly interest in each other's doings. Volunteered advice comes, so he thinks, from pure self-conceit, and is intolerable; help that he has not asked for conveys the assumption that he is a fool, and the helper ever so much wiser than he. It is in his eyes simply a form of self-assertion, an attempt at governing other people, an infringement of good manners not to be borne.

Each man is responsible for himself, each man is the maker of himself. Only he can do himself good by good thought, by good acts; only he can hurt

16:Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

himself by evil intentions and deeds. Therefore in your intercourse with others remember always yourself, remember that no one can injure you but yourself; be careful, therefore, of your acts for your own sake. For if you lose your temper, who is the sufferer? Yourself; no one but yourself. If you are guilty of disgraceful acts, of discourteous words, who suffers? Yourself. Remember that; remember that courtesy and good temper are due from you to everyone. What does it matter who the other person be? you should be courteous to him, not because he deserves it, but because you deserve it. Courtesy is measured by the giver, not by the receiver. We are apt sometimes to think that this continual care of self is selfishness; it is the very reverse. Self-reverence is the antipode of self-conceit, of selfishness. If you honour yourself, you will be careful that nothing dishonourable shall come from you. 'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control'; we, too, have had a poet who taught this.

And so dignity of manner is very marked amongst this people. It is cultivated as a gift, as the outward sign of a good heart.

'A rough diamond'; no Burman would understand this saying. The value of a diamond is that it can be polished. As long as it remains in the rough, it has no more beauty than a lump of mud. If your heart be good, so, too, will be your manners. A good tree will bring forth good fruit. If the fruit be rotten, can the tree be good? Not so. If your manners are bad, so, too, is your heart. To be courteous, even-tempered, to be tolerant and full of sympathy, these are the proofs of an inward

369 and women too did the same, and wore their HTAMEINS breast high.
291 Here except for the refugees, he does not see much of this except when
562 people are bathing in the public water hydrants. When it is hot the men wear T shirts and the women wear light garments.

369 U Myaing says that the ordinary city dweller cannot do as much
464 hard labour as the average villager. For example, he cannot carry
461 a bag of rice on his shoulders if suddenly called upon to do so.

The workers from Rangoon are much more acute than the workers from the village. They speak and understand English and Hindustani and so get to know of any possible job long before the others. The villagers do not have these advantages, and so have to join work only later and they are placed to work under them.

563 As far as U Myaing is concerned, there is no racial animosity
464 towards Indians and workers of other races. This is due to the fact that there is no racial discrimination on the part of the employers, the first suitable applicant being given the work.

369 He finds that Rangoon has a much more equable climate than
132 Pathwe. In Rangoon it is not as cold as in Pathwe, where in the cold season it was very cold even though they lived in a proper house and kept all the doors and windows shut. He says that they would not be able in Pathwe to live in an open dwelling like they do at present.

369 Their relatives in Rangoon keep to themselves a great deal.
●571 They work on their own and earn on their own. In Rangoon each family
602 has only sufficient for itself. "We cannot help them financially and neither can they help us much. When we go on a visit they can invite us to join in a meal or to partake of sweet tea, but they would not be able to lend us fifty or a hundred rupees. In Pathwe we could lend each other any amount up till a thousand five hundred rupees and that free of interest. These loans also need to be repaid only when it is convenient to the debtor. It would be inconvenient to have to repay a loan while the money was in the form of goods."

159 U Myaings eldest daughter has returned to the camp because the
369 woman who owns the charoot rolling business has temporarily closed it
602 down and gone to Pantanaw with goods like onions, prawns and textiles. Since the girl is not sufficiently dexterous to find work elsewhere as